

John R. Seeley, Loving Scholar

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What I want to say here is more of an appreciation than a formal essay. It feels more to me like a coda than the finished whole of a work. The feeling, or notion, of a coda seems appropriate both because I do not have a formal and closed relationship with Jack Seeley, and because I hope that what I am to say here hints and touches some of the incandescent richness that Jack Seeley has added to my life.

This is a note about love and about scholarship: about the pathways of the mind and the pathways of the heart. More importantly, this is an essay about the connections—the dysjunctions and conjunctions—of those pathways as I have experienced them with or because of Jack. Finally, it is an appreciation of and for a person for whom those conjunctions have been, and are, and will be *lived through* as the subjects for personification and professional impassioned exploration.

This is an essay written in the first person. This is so because I have come to learn much of what I cherish and fear of “first persons”—myself—because of insights given me, in touch, tone, and talk by a person who taught and teaches me a great deal of the difficulty of being a self: of being and doing the conjunction of those pathways to heart and mind.

Thus, what follows is an attempt to appreciate by example. The example—the melding of loving and scholarship—is the person of John R. Seeley. I have known Jack since 1954, and the years since that time have shown me, in Jack, a loving intelligence the likes of which I regard as more rare than a precious jewel. I am going to try and convey here a sharing of the rare kind that Jack and I have enjoyed. That sharing is premised, rooted, in my deep love and respect for the passion and the intelligence that meld to make Jack deserving of codas and full movements, too.

I had been working at NIMH when I met Jack in Indianapolis in 1954. I had called to meet him at the suggestion of David Riesman who felt that Jack would be an important contributor to my

work at NIMH. I was concerned then—as Jack and I are still today—with mental health, defined not as limited to illness, but including well-being and enhancement of development. I was responsible for convening a group of persons, from a broad array of disciplines, who were similarly concerned with mental health. If we had anything in common it was the belief that strictly disciplinary outlooks on massive problems would potentially blind us all, rather than give sight or cure to person or problem. The group consisted of people who were trained to see, and see beyond, law, education, ecology, planning, sociology, journalism, psychiatry, ethology, mathematics, and philosophy. It was a group avowedly concerned with working at the disciplinary and “edges” of the known. It was not unlikely that the group was dubbed, by one of its members, the “Space Cadets.”

Of them all, Jack was of a special and unique kind. It showed almost instantly when I met him in the Student Union in Bloomington. He walked up to me, a man small of build but so obviously glowing with warmth that there was then, as there is now, a radiance that gave off feelings of welcome, strength, and an almost awesome sincerity. From the soft-spoken person came a combination that remains rare and remarkable: an obvious critical intelligence almost without visible limit, but carried by a person who *meant* his concern, *meant* his embrace of you, and *meant* his interest in you and your concerns and ideas.

That first conversation, as I remember it now, seems to me to be prescient and prototypical: the range and depth of the intelligence have, if anything, deepened over these two-plus decades. And the warmth and loving quality of the person-as-scholar have been a source of support and strength for the many people who have come to call, to listen, and to share with Jack, as I have done, over these difficult years.

It was apparent then, as it is now, that Jack needs an arena where sheer singular concerns are recognized as necessary, but are known never to be sufficient. It was just these sort of people that, to one extent or another, were the “Space Cadets,” and it is just this sort of fertile imagination that Jack brought to that group, and to the many lesser and larger concerns that Jack and I have known together since that time.

Jack, and his work, *encompass*. That encompassing is done with a subtle ease, a distinction of bearing and demeanor, that seems almost out

*This paper could not have been written without the active assistance of Stephen R. Blum who has been both a student and colleague of mine, as well as John Seeley's. His love for Jack is expressed in this piece as much as mine is. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that he has only known Jack in the last few years, he would have been one who could have expressed many of these feelings as easily as I.

of place in the world of harsh voices clamoring for the single-focus technological expertise which has brought us much and, I fear, cost us much more. It is possible and necessary, as I learned with Jack and the Space Cadets experience, to be ultimately very serious about mental health—about humans not at peace in a world not at peace—and *not* wear a set of glasses that limit rather than expand vision.

The conversations that started in Indiana moved to Washington and the discussions of the Space Cadets. We talked and talked—those were the beginnings of conversations that have gone on at least monthly, usually more often, with a sustained and sustaining regularity over these two decades. Throughout that time I have been regularly amazed by the depths of perception that his conversation moves me to be active and comfortable with. As uncomfortable as it may make this very strong man to know in his real humility it needs to be admitted: Jack awes people. That range of knowledge, that passionate caring for others, that grasp of matters and movements is awesome. And we who are his friends can and should make Jack a little less uncomfortable with being awed. After all, it is but a component of our love and respect not for the knowledge, but for the person who, incidentally, has and is the knowledge, too.

Others writing here will speak of the seminal influence of Jack's written work. The contribution that Jack makes to a melding of anthropology, sociology, and personal action that came to be called "community studies" is classically represented in *Crestwood Heights* (1956), and *Community Chest* (1957). Both before and after these works came an outpouring of writings from this man—who never quite received his Ph.D.—which consistently showed him to be an expert almost wherever his mind took him. And it took him to a staggering range of places that, in his published work, included but was not limited to explorations in psychotherapy, politics, alcoholism, community development, problems associated with poverty (defined as broadly as they truly need to be), educational experimentation, evaluation studies, planning as a practice, a discipline, and a theory, public health, and a host of other areas that fascinate him still. The results of that work—at least the published results of it—fill my personal copy of his bibliography that is, itself, book-sized and which is a constant chore for Jack and his friends to keep updated.

Regrettably, there is presently only one book of selected essays available, *The Americanization of the Unconscious* (1967). The richness of those essays, and the multiple others which I have regularly received over the years, has been a constant source of conjecture, discussion, and real intellectual and emotional expansion for me—and for the many colleagues and students that I have

had the privilege of sharing those thoughts with over the years.

So the work—the scholarly writings—have influenced me, too, but I suspect *less* than they have influenced others. This is so, not because I have not been impressed by the probing and the range and the seriously radical suggestions that Jack has consistently made—no, not that at all. Rather, I have had the good fortune and the on-going blessing of seeing and hearing these publications in their pre-published form in the warmth of a dozen homes scattered across several years and several countries. I have listened to the birth and development of Jack's ideas in Boston and Berkeley, in England and Santa Barbara, and on not a few airplanes to points in between. Mine has been the good fortune to hear the birth of a concern, a passion, often before or as it was becoming a printed page. And so I will leave it to Jack's other friends and colleagues who are represented here (and who are, in a larger way, represented in a great number of more and less formal environments) to speak in detail about the papers that have been written, the speeches made, and the ideas and peoples shaped by them. I want here to remain both personal and professional because that combination characterizes some of the connections that have made this special friendship that I feel with and for Jack.

Though the papers provide insight and compassion, and the speeches are marvels of intricate analysis of problems that defy and frighten us all, it is not these things that I want to be centrally concerned with here, as important as they are in honoring Jack. It seems important to me—I am touched and feel the wish to tell you of my being touched—to talk of the relationship between two persons, Jack and myself, as it has proceeded through, in, and around our "professional lives."

People who know me often joke, sometimes semi-seriously, about my own need to be connected to my friends. I, unlike Jack, am not a copious keeper of notes and not a master of my own filing systems. Rather my own need to make contact is often a spoken one. Insofar as Jack and I have not had the pleasure of living in the same community for any amount of time—there was an all-to-brief year or so in Berkeley not too long ago—that has meant that we have called each other on the telephone. Certainly one obtrusive measure of the extent, if not the depth, of our relationship would be what I would guess are, for each of us, a mildly amazing longitudinal series of telephone bills that each of us has had to contend with in one fashion or another over the years.

Those calls, I think, hold something of a clue to the man I am trying to "catch" in print here. Those calls, while they often consist of some "business" of one kind or another, almost never have failed to be concerned with the intimate and

ultimate concerns of our lives: our families, and the worlds of concern that preoccupy them and us. For Jack it would be—I know and I am pleased to be proud of knowing—quite impossible to not talk of Margaret, the extraordinary woman who is his wife and mother to their four sons. It is a call to or from Jack that is both pleased and proud, worried and maybe wondering, about Margaret and “the boys” and the extended family that has been the Seeley household for as long as I have known it. We have—for and with each other—traced and shared and lived through the intersection of the personal and the professional, of trial and tribulation, that Jack has known with some regularity.

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You shall love your crooked neighbor
With your crooked heart.

W. H. Auden
“As I Walked Out One Evening”

I have known, perhaps more than anyone outside his immediate family, Jack’s worldly doings. Moments of great agony and deep pain have had their time with Jack: when he has been let down by persons whom he assumed would honor moral commitments. When persons have turned on Jack he has felt these turnings with confusion, compassion, and pain. While not being self-less, although he is often that, Jack as learned in a series of incredible circumstances to learn to at least understand, if not to love, his crooked neighbor. The nature of those events, the pain and peril that they caused Jack, and by extension his family and those friends he allowed to share his pain with, are not worth detailing here. They are not worth detailing for those wounds did not demean Jack nearly in the way they seem, over time, to have hurt and confused the persons and institutions that have not honored the values and commitments that Jack feels are necessary for persons to honor in order to maintain love and freedom among ourselves.

In these periods of pain, and the attendant confusion they have brought, I have witnessed in Jack what, it feels to me, is the outstanding mark of the man: this is a moral man. That sense of morality, of commitment to right action regardless if the actions taken and the views written and spoken are those of a minority, pervade the man and his family, his work, and his being with persons. Jack’s critique of some of the devastation done in the name of “social service programs” and policies, be they the “war on poverty” or “experimental schools,” have been sustained. He has been careful in analysis and concerned always to understand what is being done to people regardless of rhetoric, and regardless of the prestige and power of the persons or institutions that carry and use the rhetoric. Jack not only sees through these (often thin) sheens of worlds and deeds but, more importantly, he has looked *into*

the fabric, sensed the design, and spoken out against it as being of poor manufacture. This was as true in his contributions to the Space Cadets as it was in his work years later with the far more inflexible federal bureaucracy which is the cabal that administers school systems which are not educational in any sense. The critique, or critiques as they should more accurately be called insofar as they have been multiple, are constantly given with no rancor, with no personal hostility, and only (and very powerfully) with the humility of a “man-child” who is hurt and surprised and annoyed that persons could do an array of things—be they programs, policies, or politics—that end up demeaning or hurting others. In a paper written in 1962, “What is Planning? Definition and Strategy,” Jack spoke of his belief that whatever planning may be it is, or must needs be, an art or art form. Where Jack has not seen art, but only uninformed technique masquerading as art, he has spoken out against it.

That which is spoken out against is oppression of all kinds and in all places: oppression of the ill, the alcoholic, the poor; oppression of minority peoples—be they Jew, Black, Asian, Chicano, women, children, or the highly valuable “fringe” institutions which struggle to realize their seemingly strange or new visions. Jack has stood up and spoken against oppression symbolized by the official and unofficial harassment of persons and things that are not, and may never well be, in whatever it is that we call the “mainstream,” be they the Diggers, students, the Free Speech Movement and its multiple progeny on and off campus, and alternative forms of education.

In an essay originally published in *Liberation*, “Progress From Poverty,” (1966), that I am sure Jack and I both wish were not still very timely and horribly contemporary, Jack described poverty as “the lack of power to command events” that affect one’s life. On those grounds, in a deep, existential and whole sense, we are all, now and forever, *somewhat* poor. But it is that highly differential meaning of “somewhat” that Jack has been continuously concerned with: anything and anyone that is a gate-keeper for the control of your life, of your love, of your educational aspirations, of your wish for security—financial or otherwise—that gate-keeper is Jack’s enemy.

Enemy!—a strong word, and one that comes with slow caring from Jack. Even here he has treated the enemies with love and understanding, for Jack understands better than anyone I have known that these enemies are, at base, not enemies but rather persons with different values. This is not to say one does not labor to change enemies. It *does* mean the labor—even if in the middle of politicized heat at 3:00 a.m.—should not do violence to an enemy, for that would accord him or her distorted dignity. In so doing, you deprive yourself and your vision of that love.

Jack helps you and me connect and understand other's need for their poverty-producing power which belittles us. Our escape from belittlement, from being demeaned, *from being poor*—in Jack's startlingly accurate, encompassing definition of poverty—is an understanding love. Not just understanding. And not just loving. Jack has seen multitudes of people in his untalked-about work as a fine lay therapist to many of the "lost children" of this generation, and he knows well the consequences of *just* understanding, or of *only* loving. John R. Seeley combines and connects loving *and* understanding.

Do you know much of Jack's background? Let me begin to close the coda with some first-person(al) notes about what that background has done and made and been and where it seems to me to lead us all who here acknowledge the special person that Jack is.

John R. Seeley was born in London in 1913 to a well-to-do family. In a sense he had neither father nor mother. His father, a commodity merchant in the wheat market, wandered the continent, rarely returning, though Jack has passed on to me memories of his father wearing a Russian fur coat and bearing Christmas toys. His father died early.

His mother is better left undescribed. The household could well have come out of a Gothic novel, a Dickens tale, or a psychiatric text-book. At the age of nine, Jack was sent to Heidelberg College where, in an atmosphere of almost sadistic cruelty (though it seemed kind compared with home) mixed with Germanic scholarship, his vast learning began. It was the early 1920's, the time of Hitler's early beginnings, and he was left alone in Europe to sense and see the horror, hate and brutality on all sides. In 1924 he went to boarding school in England.

Home again at fifteen, the household was no better. His choice lay between independence and escape or "comfort" and participation in the insanity. He chose independence and abysmal poverty. One day, while walking around Trafalgar Square, he planned to get away. He thought of Australia and Canada. Because a poster hinted at independence—"Come to Canada. Be Your Own Boss at Twenty-one,"—Jack went to Canada with £5 from the family fortune. And so at the age of fifteen, the physically-slight man began his new life in the new country as a laborer, a manual worker, an Ontario farm-hand.

There followed later self-education in Toronto, and years later, as a sociology student he was part of the "Chicago school" at the University of Chicago. He completed all but the dissertation. Distinctions were everywhere. He had the special friendship of a person who guided him. He married Margaret in 1943, and found sustenance and warmth from her and her large Irish-French Canadian family.

Which or all of these things combined made the adult Jack Seeley I met in 1954, we will probably never know. But they weave together, they are important facts and feelings for Jack, and they connect and reconnect him to family, to ideas of oppression, and to multi-national perspectives. The warmth, the insight, and the perspective all have some of their bases in this brief background which I wanted to share with you.

I want to also provide and share a brief overview of the career, the personal and emotional trajectory of Jack. I should not neglect to at least mention what are for me a series of epiphanies that I have known about Jack and his work and life which, like his upbringing, mix the fascinating with the fundamentally disconcerting.

Jack's entry into different worlds has included membership of several juvenile gangs and intimate contact with the Syndicate in the Back-of-the-Yards section of Chicago: taking on with scholarly and personal vigor the Indianapolis establishment in his study of the Community Chest; redirecting the efforts of the mental health work of the Canadian Chief of Staff during World War II in London with Brock Chisholm; and, just before I met him, the insightful years in "Forest Hill Village" which yielded the classic community study, *Crestwood Heights*.

Since I have known Jack he has directed a major alcohol study and rehabilitation program in Ontario where he achieved international recognition for his humane contributions to this still immensely difficult scene and syndrome. He has been a professor and chairman of what was a truly extraordinary Department of Sociology at Brandeis (1963-1966) where he developed a long friendship with the late Erich Lindemann at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston while he was also consultant to Benson Snyder in the Medical Department at M.I.T.; and he was the Dean of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. In all of these places he fought for what he believed in—that is, us, people—and there was a series of prices, personal and professional, that this proud and loving man paid to persons who did not or would not see his consistent moral concern.

He and I fought together as co-directors to keep alive a doomed evaluation project that was to look at the federally-funded experimental school program in Berkeley. He knew all too well the barely-bearable frustrations of working with federal bureaucrats for whom changing the name of the game was policy rather than the surreal exercise in confusion and depression that Jack knew it to be for him, for me, and for our entire staff. He worked with the Department of Psychiatry at U.C.L.A. in their study of violence, and could not and would not live with the policy confusion over doing and making harm on

people. Jack has worked, again in psychiatry, at the Drew Post-Graduate Center in Watts.

In all of these places, in all of these atmospheres of normal frenzy and concern, Jack has brought a consistent insight and voice for linking, for probing without causing severe injury, for searching for new ideas and persons and techniques, and for supporting the oppressed. This he has done by human and humane touching, by healing others who had manifold hurts, while deep inside his own pain and anguish often smouldered with the vital questions he asks of himself: "Did I do it wrong?" "Did I hurt anyone?" "What about the family?"

Always when talking to me of what he is worried about, he has been open and loving with me and with my competing problems. Through his own anguish in an unstable world, he nurtured me through a divorce, through a series of opening and growing changes in my own life, and taught classes with me at Berkeley. I learned and felt much from our interaction. He gave, and gives, much through his support, devotion, and concern for me as a person and friend.

John R. Seeley is as complex a man as he is a beautiful person. I firmly believe that he should

be in some place—where is it?—where he would be Distinguished Professor Without Portfolio. He would just "be around"—around students, and us; around to teach; around to listen; around to love; and around for us to see what a melding of courage, vision, and substance can be for and about.

Sometimes Jack has been blamed, like a human lightning rod, for the storms that have struck some of the places he has been. And yet if he has been that rod, he has also been the prophet who knew, all too well, that a storm was coming, and that blame for it would have to be allocated to someone who could at least not break under the pain and heat and confusion.

Jack does not break; he is there, stating what he sees with a clarity that is often disarming and, therefore, somewhat fearful to some who listen.

If I bring to this essay, to this coda of admiration and love for my friend, John R. Seeley, any single regret or pain it is that we, his students and his friends, cannot yet accept his broad vision or his love as guides for human kind. Too many people continue to not see some of the confluence of passion and scholarship that John R. Seeley shows us at what is surely our personal and professional peril.